

CANADA *at the* GRAVE *of* GENERAL WOLFE

"The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

"I thank God and die contented."



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To realize the debt we owe to Wolfe, it is only necessary to glance for a moment at some of the incidents of the Seven Years' War. Let us look first at the characters in the drama. On the side of Prussia, Frederick the Great, with the army which had been bequeathed by his father, "the best engine of war in Europe," and he himself the first warrior of his time, if not of all time. On the side of France, Lowendal and Marshal Saxe, and on this continent, the Marquis de Montcalm, the Chevalier Le Levis, the Chevalier de Bourlamaque, Baron Dieskau, Bougainville, and others. On the side of England, the Duke of Cumberland, the victor at Culloden, and in statesmanship, Fox, Carteret, the two Townshends, Mansfield, Halifax, but above and beyond all, the great commoner, William Pitt, dearly loving England, and himself described as "England incarnate"; on this continent on the British side, Brigadier Lord Howe, Braddock, Major-General Amherst, and under him the three brigadiers, Whitmore, Lawrence and Wolfe, and in the Colonial forces, with Braddock at Monongahela, and as his aide-de-camp in the expedition against Fort Duquesne, Adjutant-General George Washington of the Virginia militia, Shirley, and Robert Rogers, with his famous rangers.

With such combatants in the field, great results were to be expected. "This," said Earl Granville on his deathbed, "has been the most glorious war and the most triumphant peace that England ever knew," "The Peace of Paris," says Parkman, "marks an epoch than which none in modern history is fruitful of grander results." "It is no exaggeration to say," writes Green, "that three of the many victories of the Seven Years' War determined for ages to come the destinies of mankind.

With that of Rossbach began the re-creation of Germany; with that of Plassey, the influence of Europe told for the first time since the days of Alexander on the nations of the East; with the triumph of Wolfe on the Heights of Abraham began the history of the United States"—and he might have added, of British America.

To understand the position on this continent it is necessary to remember that before the Seven Years' War the French, to use Parkman's words, "claimed all America from the Alleghanies to the Rocky Mountains, and from Mexico and Florida to the North Pole, except only the ill-defined possessions of the English on the borders of Hudson's Bay; and to these vast regions, with adjacent islands, they gave the general name of New France. . . . Canada at the north and Louisiana at the south were the keys of a boundless interior, rich with incalculable possibilities."

The English colonies, ranged along the Atlantic Coast, had no royal road to the great inland, and were in a manner shut between the mountains and the sea. To break through these boundaries and spread over the vast hinterland of the continent was the object of the British colonists, and for years the struggle raged between the colonists and the Canadians along the forts of the Ohio, on the Great Lakes, at Ticonderoga, Crown Point and Fort William Henry, and along Lake Champlain, at Louisbourg, in Acadia, and finally at Quebec, where Wolfe's marvellous victory on the Plains of Abraham made this an Anglo-Saxon continent, began the history of the United States, gave birth to Canada, and widened the boundaries of the British Empire to include this great Dominion. If Napoleon had succeeded at the Battle of Trafalgar, it has been said, "the fate of the world would have been changed. Toronto and Cape Town, Melbourne and Sydney and Auckland might have been ruled by French prefects." Had not Wolfe succeeded at Quebec there would have been no North America for Nelson to save. What do we not owe to both? Is it too much after the lapse of so great a time, and on the 150th anniversary of the battle of the Plains of Abraham, to ask the Canadian people to honor his memory by erecting a monument at the grave at Greenwich to show that Canada at any rate does honor to the hero whose victory and death were

destined to give her birth? I say nothing of the duty of the United States. Had Wolfe not broken the French power, the British colonists would have been overwhelmed in any attempt to break through the barriers that herded them between the mountains and the sea. Had not the French menace been removed, it would have been folly on their part to throw off their British allegiance, only to risk falling under French control. Wolfe's victory paved the way. But for that great event the Declaration of Independence might never have been written. It certainly would have been postponed.

A word with regard to the Marquis de Montcalm and the brave and chivalrous nation for whom he fought. Never was a war contested under greater difficulties than those which Montcalm had to face. Louis XV and Pompadour furnished 100,000 men to fight the battles of Austria, and but twelve hundred to help New France. Had the proportions been reversed, or anything like it, what would have happened? Vaudreuil as governor, representing Old France, did everything which malignant jealousy could suggest to undermine and checkmate Montcalm; had he loyally supported him, what might have been the result? Besides Vaudreuil, there was the unspeakable Bigot, the rascally Cadet, and Pean, Breard and many more to struggle against in his own ranks. Was ever a brave leader more harassed than poor Montcalm? A noble spirit—and great and noble he certainly was—never struggled against greater neglect on the part of his masters and more persistent and insidious treachery amongst colleagues than did Montcalm.

“The France of Louis XV,” wrote the Abbé Casgrain, “hastened to forget the memory of Montcalm which lay upon it as a burden of remorse. The France of America will always cherish it. It has forgotten his faults to remember only his virtues and his heroism. The name of Montcalm is inscribed on our monuments and public places. History and poetry have joined hands to celebrate the national heritage of his glory. The mausoleum raised over his tomb a century after his death is not less honored than that of Wolfe at Westminster.”

Can we point to the same devotion on the part of the England of America, a like reverence for the memory of the great Wolfe, by whose victory the American continent became the heritage

of the Anglo-Saxon race? Do we make pilgrimages to the grave of our great hero? What columns, what mausoleum have we erected over his last resting place? I question very much if one in a thousand British Canadians could name the place where General Wolfe's remains were laid at rest on November 23rd, 1759.

General the Marquis de Montcalm was buried practically on the field of battle, in the very ground for which he fought, and surrounded by the sorrowing people for whom he died. "The confusion in Quebec was such," writes the Abbé Casgrain, "that it was impossible to find a workman to make a coffin for the deceased general. Seeing this difficulty," says the annalist of the Ursulines, "our foreman, an old Frenchman of Dauphine, known amongst us as Bonhomme Michel, hastily got together some planks, and, shedding copious tears, made a rough box little in keeping with the precious corpse it was to hold. The body of the brave soldier was laid within it, and at about nine p.m. the funeral procession started for the Ursulines' chapel, through the streets encumbered with debris and ruined walls. Behind the coffin marched in mournful silence the commander of the garrison with his officers, and many citizens, their number being added to as they advanced by the townsfolk, women and children. No tolling bells or salvos of artillery announced the general's funeral, for the only guns that spoke hurled projectiles on the town. The crowd filled the church, wherein all was absolutely dark save for the wax tapers arranged round the trestles which bore the bier. To the right close to the convent chapel's railing a bombshell had torn up the flooring, and made an excavation in the soil. This cavity it was which, enlarged and deepened, formed a suitable soldier's grave."

The curé of Quebec, Abbé Resche, assisted by two of the cathedral canons, intoned the Libera, those present, and the choir of eight nuns, who remained to guard the convent, responding. Then the coffin was lowered into the ditch, "whereupon," says the convent's chronicler, "the sobs and tears broke out afresh, for it seemed as though New France were descending into the grave with her general's remains."

Had Wolfe been buried in Canadian soil, no doubt his grave would long ere this have been suitably honored by Canada, the

young but giant nation for which his victory paved the way on this continent. But after the battle of the Plains of Abraham, Wolfe's remains were sent to England. In one of the last days of October the cannon on the ramparts of Quebec answered the salute of the fleet which had set sail for England. On board the Royal William were the embalmed remains of General Wolfe. On Saturday, November 17, 1759, the following entry appears in "The Gentleman's Magazine," Vol. XXIX: "This day the remains of General Wolfe were landed at Portsmouth from on board the Royal William man-of-war; during the solemnity minute guns were fired from the ships at Spithead, and all the honors that could be paid to the memory of a gallant officer were paid on this occasion" (p. 548). On Tuesday, Nov. 20, this entry appears: "The corpse of General Wolfe was interred in a private manner in the family vault at Greenwich." The entries in the burial register of the parish church of St. Alfege at Greenwich for November, 1759, include many of the very poor, a foundling, a "found drowned," and the illustrious general.

The potter's child, the poor, the foundling, the found drowned, and the illustrious general who secured the greatest of continents for the Anglo-Saxon race, pass off the stage, their exits recorded without distinction. The "Elegy" had been written but eight years before the fall of Quebec, and Wolfe loved its mellow music and sweet but sad philosophy. How strikingly is the teaching of the "Elegy" enforced by a page from the register of St. Alfege!

"Let not ambition mock their native toil,
Their humble joys and destiny obscure,
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave
Alike await the inevitable hour;
The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

The words of Parkman and the Abbé Casgrain tell us little or nothing of the ceremonies which took place on the arrival of the remains of General Wolfe in England. A pretty full record is

contained in the Annual Register for 1759, Vol. 2, commencing at page 282. The story is reproduced in W. A. Russell's History of England, 1783:

"1759. The remains of that gallant hero General Wolfe were deposited in the country for the defence of which he had lost his life.

"On Sunday, Nov. 17th, at seven o'clock in the morning, H.M.S. Royal William (in which his corpse was brought from Quebec to Portsmouth) fired two signal guns for the removal of his remains.

"At eight o'clock the body was lowered out of the ship into a twelve-oared barge, towed by two twelve-oared barges, and attended by twelve others to the bottom of the point in a train of silent, gloomy pomp, suitable to the melancholy occasion.

"Minute guns were fired from the ships at Spithead from the time of the body's leaving the ship to its being landed at Portsmouth, which was one hour. The regiment of invalids was ordered under arms before eight, and being joined by a company of the train at Portsmouth, marched from the parade there to the bottom of the point, to receive the remains.

"At nine the body was landed and put into a hearse, attended by a mourning coach (both sent from London), and proceeded through the garrison.

"The colors of the fort were struck half-flag-staff; the bells were muffled, and rung in solemn concert with the march; minute guns were fired on the platform, from the entrance of the corpse to the close of the procession; the company of the train led the van with their arms reversed; the corpse followed, and the invalid regiments followed the hearse, their arms reversed. They conducted the body to the Landport gates, where the train opened to the right and left, and the hearse proceeded through them on the way to London. Many thousands of people assembled on this occasion. Nothing was to be heard but murmuring, broken accents in praise of the dead hero.

"On the 20th at night his remains were deposited in the burial place belonging to his family at Greenwich."

On the day following the burial at Greenwich, the House of Commons decided to erect a suitable monument at Westminster Abbey. This is the monument referred to by the Abbé Casgrain

in the opening extract. It was executed by Wilton in marble, and represents the dying hero sinking into the arms of a grenadier. His right hand presses his mortal wound. The grenadier is pointing out the Goddess of Fame hovering overhead. In the background is a mourning Highlander.

The descriptive part of the design is, in the main, in accordance with the story as generally accepted.

Parkman portrays the feeling of jubilation which swept over England on hearing the news of Wolfe's great victory. England blazed with bonfires. In one spot alone, he adds, all was dark and silent; for here a widowed mother mourned for a loving and devoted son, and the people forebore to profane her grief with the clamor of their rejoicings. The place referred to was Blackheath, which just adjoins Greenwich Road. It was from Blackheath, while preparing to sail to America, that Wolfe wrote these words to his mother: "All I hope is that I may be ready at all times to meet that fate which no one can avoid, and to die with grace and honor when my hour has come, whether it be soon or late."

In an address to the Canadian Club of Winnipeg in 1906 I could not refrain from saying: "In contemplating the grave of Wolfe at the old parish church of St. Alfege, in Greenwich, one cannot but recall his marvellous bravery and the brilliant generalship that planned the attack at the Anse du Foulon, which led to the capture of Quebec and the cession of this continent to the Anglo-Saxon race. The first impulse is to look around for some great monument, some vast mausoleum, or in default of that some memorial window, brass or mural tablet—some indication of the love and sympathy, or at least some sign of gratitude on the part of the Canadian people. But there is nothing. The dark, mysterious crypt is there, as is the iron grating, which is pointed to as indicating the exact position of the tomb. These are cold and forbidding enough. But that is all. Canada has done nothing. New England and its lineal successors, the United States, have done nothing. Had it not been for efforts of a private person—Mr. Frederick Fountain, a church warden—by whom a beautiful memorial window was placed in the church in 1896, nearly a century and a half after the fall of Quebec, there would be nothing at St. Alfege to indi-

cate that to Wolfe the Anglo-Saxon race on this continent almost owes its existence. Do not the people of Canada owe it to themselves, as well as to the memory of the great Wolfe, to take some action which will fittingly express their appreciation of the achievement of the illustrious hero to whom this continent owes so much?"

Since then much has occurred to awaken British and Canadian interest in General Wolfe. It was felt that the ceremonial of the Champlain Tercentenary should find some echo at Wolfe's grave. On the 20th of November, 1908, a mural tablet with a medallion of General Wolfe, crowned with the words from his favorite Elegy, "A heart once pregnant with celestial fire," was unveiled over the spot beneath which he lies buried, and a plate was placed in the floor immediately over the burial vault. The tablet was paid for by public subscriptions taken up in the church at the unveiling service and from the officers of the army. At Bath a tablet has been placed by the mayor and corporation on the house once occupied by Wolfe. And at Westerham a memorial window has been erected by public subscription in the parish church. The subject is "The Nativity," treated according to the designs of the late Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Bart. A bronze statue will be unveiled at Westerham next January in the vicinity of the house where General Wolfe was born, and at Quebec House where he spent a portion of his life. On the stained glass window at Greenwich is a representation of St. George and the dragon surrounded by an enumeration of some of the engagements in which General Wolfe became famous—Dettingen, Fontenoy, Falkirk, Maestricht, Rochefort—and underneath is the famous line from Gray's Elegy, recited by Wolfe the night before the battle on the Plains of Abraham, "The paths of glory lead but to the grave," and the hero's last words, "I thank God and die contented." There is no tablet or memorial of any kind at Macartney House, Blackheath, where he bade good-bye to his mother on leaving for America.

Great Britain has become thoroughly aroused to the necessity of actively perpetuating the memory and achievements of General Wolfe, but much remains to be done in which Canada should have a share, and I beg once more to press the suggestion which I have urged since 1906 that this country, which owes its existence to General Wolfe, should seek out the place of honor, at the graveside itself, and there erect a monument worthy of this country, and of its first and greatest hero.

